
Transportation Committee

SHB 1702

Brief Description: Recovering costs for motorist information signs.

Sponsors: House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Hatfield, Mielke, Romero, Armstrong, Cooper, Blake, Boldt, Orcutt, Santos, McCoy, Alexander, Schoesler, Chandler, Grant, Schindler and Condotta).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Transportation to charge reasonable fees to recover their costs for the erection and maintenance of motorist information sign panels.
- Repeals current law requiring the Department of Transportation to contract out the motorist information sign program.
- Allows fruit and vegetable stand operators to participate in the Motorist Information sign program.

Hearing Date: 2/2/04

Staff: Jill Satran (786-7315).

Background:

Under current law the Department of Transportation (DOT) is authorized to erect and maintain motorist information sign panels within the right of way of the highway system to provide the traveling public with information regarding gas, food, lodging, and tourist-oriented businesses available at or near an interchange. The DOT is required to charge reasonable fees to defray the cost of installation and maintenance of the individual business signs on the motorist information panels. However, current language falls short of requiring, but rather authorizes the DOT to also charge reasonable fees to recover their costs for the erection and maintenance of the information sign panels.

A law change was made during the 2002 legislative session which required the DOT to contract with a private contractor to administer the motorist information sign panel program. Under this law, the contractor would be solely responsible for the marketing, administration, financial management, sign fabrication, installation and maintenance of the information sign panels.

The new law authorizes the contractor to set the market rate to be charged to the businesses advertising on the information sign panels. The DOT had been charging \$100 per year for a

business to advertise on a panel located on the interstate but at this fee level, the DOT was not recovering its costs. In states where a private contractor runs the motorist information sign panel program, fees to participating businesses range from \$650 to \$4,600 per year.

In November 2003, the DOT released a request for proposal to potential vendors. In mid-December, the Washington Federation of State Employees sought an injunction against the DOT awarding a contract for this program, arguing the changes to the program constituted an impairment of the union's contract. Judge McPhee, Thurston County Superior Court Judge, granted the injunction until the case is decided.

Summary of Bill:

The DOT is required to charge reasonable fees to recover their costs for the erection and maintenance of the motorist information sign panels.

The DOT must maximize the use of available space on the motorist information sign panels and process applications submitted by businesses in a timely and efficient manner. Fruit and vegetable stands are added as a type of tourist-oriented business that could qualify to advertise on the panels.

The current law requiring the DOT to contract out the motorist information sign program is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.